

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

February 17, 2016 FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

As we begin our Lenten Journey in earnest, every year on the First Sunday of Lent, the Church gives us the Gospel account of Jesus' temptation in the desert. We have just listened to St. Luke's account.

We know for a fact that all human beings are tempted to make wrong choices----we're tempted to believe in false truths---we're "tempted" to give into sin. But, I think it's safe to say that not too many of us like to admit it ----and maybe fewer of us are willing to share with very many others the nature of what our temptations are. While we know that *to have* temptations is not a sin, we don't always feel very proud of the kinds of temptations we experience.

So, this Gospel passage of Jesus' experience with some very serious temptations, which, in one way or another, is recorded in all four of the Gospels, is somewhat comforting in the sense that if Jesus was tempted and overcame those temptations, so too can we. In addition, the reality of Jesus' temptations are amazing for at least two other reasons: first, it kind of confirms the teaching that Jesus, the Son of God, was fully divine, and fully human; and secondly, it is a *tremendous* teaching for *all* of us in terms of how we can learn to deal with temptations when, not if, they come our way. In addition, we need to be completely aware of the Devil's real existence, that he is a completely evil being, and that his one and only reason to exist is to try to destroy anything and anyone that is trying to be good. We must truly be on guard against all the tricks and ploys of the Devil to try to get us to sin.

Notice when the Devil went after Jesus: when He would have been at his weakest and His lowest point: in the desert, right after He had been baptized, and was about to begin His public ministry, and after He had been fasting for forty days and nights. The Devil went right for the jugular. He didn't tempt Jesus with any of the small stuff---Each of the three temptations recorded had to do with the heart of Jesus' ministry----how He would choose to use His divine power, and how He would choose to accomplish His mission.

The temptations of the Devil were somehow trying to distract Jesus from his goal, which was to save the world from the power of sin and death, and Jesus knew that the *only* way He could

accomplish that was through the cross. And so the Devil was doing everything in his power to convince Jesus that he could be the Messiah without the cross.

Of course, Jesus prevailed. But the temptations did not end. As we heard at the end of the Gospel: *“When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him **for a time.**”* The Devil would be back---many times.

We can learn **four** important lessons here.

The first is that Jesus wants us to know that if He was tempted, we too can expect to be tempted.

Secondly, Jesus also wants us to know that we have the same resources available to us as He had available to Him: God’s Holy Spirit was with Jesus all the time. That same Holy Spirit is with us! God the Father’s abiding and unconditional love was constant for His beloved Son. God loves each and every one of us in the same exact way. The Angels of God came to minister to Jesus to bring him comfort and protection through the temptation and afterward. And those same Angels of God are there to minister to us as well. And beyond that, we have the grace and strength of the sacraments---the Truths of our faith---and the loving strength and support that comes to us through our membership in the Church---the Body of Christ! All these resources are available to each of you all the time---to give us strength, support and divine power.

The third important lesson Jesus teaches us is that as Jesus remained focused on His goal --to win salvation for all the world through the cross and His resurrection---and rejected attempts to give in to seductive temptations to take the easy way out---so too do we need to keep focused on our ultimate goal---which is to spend all eternity with God in Heaven---by making sure that the choices that we make in our lives are the ones that will help us to get there.

And a fourth important lesson for us is how critically important it is for all of us to be strong in our faith, and to be as educated and well-informed about our faith as possible. Jesus was able to prevail over Satan’s deceitful and empty promises because Jesus was absolutely sure Who He was in His relationship with His Father and their Holy Spirit; and Jesus was extremely well versed in God’s Word, so that when the Devil misquoted scripture, Jesus was able to quote the real and true passages that taught the Truth of God’s Word.

We can not stand up against challenges to our faith if we are not absolutely sure what it is that we believe, and why it is that we believe it. We can not stay strong to our principles of faith and our Christian values if we're not aware of what they are. We can't stay true to ourselves if we're not sure what it is that we believe, what we stand for, what is so important to us in our belief system that we would be willing to give our lives for. The Devil is good at his job---that's why he's been around for aeons. He relies on finding our weak points; he uses deception and empty promises as his greatest tools. We must know how to see through those lies when they come our way so that we can stand up for our faith and be faithful to who we are.

We are not ever empty-handed. We have the Spirit of God living within us always---we are Temples of the Holy Spirit. We have the grace of our baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit through our confirmation. We have the Truths of our faith and the power of the scriptures, and the Tradition of our Church, and the support of the entire communion of Saints and our Blessed Mother. Most importantly of all, of course, is the Real Presence of Jesus and our true life, that comes to us through the Holy Eucharist---our strength and our nourishment.

Let us remember the powerful words of St. Paul to the Romans in today's Second Reading: *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* And that conviction and belief, of course, leads to a strong witness in our lives of who we are as faith-filled disciples of Christ

Dear friends: remember---confess.....believe.....give witness to your faith.....and keep your heart open to the loving and abiding Presence of Christ's love for you always!

God bless you, now and always!